

[0025] Whatever form the instrumentality takes, Figure 5 illustrate that in accordance with the invention when instrumentality 150 is invoked by the user by clicking on the icon or otherwise enabling the instrumentality, a separate menu 160 appears which in this embodiment displays all of the allowed options that a user might wish to invoke. It will be appreciated by those with skill in the art that other than all of the allowed options may be displayed, for example, only those options that are not visually present on the GUI may be displayed on menu 160. Moreover, a list of all options available on the GUI as well as those not found on the GUI but which are only in other drop-down menus may be displayed on separate menu 160. Additionally, other than a separate menu 160 may be provided to display all of the options. For example, a tree structure having the different options marked by bullets that can be clicked on to open the options may be employed, or a folder/subfolder arrangement may be provided which classifies the options into different types for storage in the folders and subfolders to be accessed therefrom.

[0026] As can be seen, in the embodiment of Figure 5 menu 160 comprises four separate areas corresponding to different software options available to the user. A first area 162 displays options that are not associated with option areas 30, 40, 50. Rather, first area 162 displays options relating to mouse menus which a user may access through the GUI after separate menu 160 is accessed. Area 164 displays options that correspond to those found in option area 30; print, save, query and update. Area 166 displays options that correspond to those found in option area 40; print, update and re-sync. Similarly, area 168 displays options that correspond to those found in option area 50; print, query and send. Any or all of the options displayed on menu 160 in areas 162, 164, 166, 168 may be hidden from the user through the GUI before the icon 150 is invoked, and so they only become apparent to the user when the separate menu 160 is displayed. This allows the user fast and easy access to the options with long, frustrating periods of search for the functionality provided by these options.

[0027] Figure 6 illustrates yet another alternative embodiment of GUIs provided in accordance with the present invention. In Figure 6, the option areas 30, 40, 50 are

made more distinct by simply shading or otherwise altering the color scheme or fill of the areas in a distinctive manner. In this fashion, the user will be better able to view the various option areas 30, 40, 50 and thereby more easily spot the options that are made available through GUI 10. In this embodiment, the instrumentality is simply a toggle of one of the keys on the keyboard, and thus no icon is present.

[0028] Thus, the present invention allows GUIs to function efficiently and expeditiously for users that are in need of invoking any software function that is offered by the software package. The inventive GUIs described and claimed herein eliminate the need for users to unnecessarily search for and find hidden functions, thereby preventing the user from being distracted from the task at hand. Moreover, the GUIs provided in accordance with the present invention allow software packages to be used to their fullest capabilities and also widen the spectrum of users that will be able to utilize these capabilities since even a relatively inexperienced GUI operator will have the ability to gain access to all of the software's functionality very easily. These results have not heretofore been achieved in the art.

[0029] While there have been shown and described and pointed out certain novel features of the present invention as applied to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various omissions and substitutions and changes in the methods and apparatus described herein, and in their operation, may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. It is expressly intended that all combinations of those elements and/or method steps which perform substantially the same function in substantially the same way to achieve the same results are within the scope of the invention. Substitutions of method steps and elements from one described embodiment to another are also fully intended and contemplated. It is the intention, therefore, to be limited only as indicated by the scope of the claims appended hereto.